

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Yisro



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Yisro

Emunah

The Noam Elimelech translates the beginning of the Aseres HaDibros (*Shemos* 20:1-2), וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים, האלה, "Hashem said that the purpose of the Aseres HaDibros and all mitzvos of the Torah, לאמר, is so people will be able to say אנכי ד' אלקיך and to believe in Hashem. For this is the *segulah* of the 613 mitzvos; they bring *emunah* into our hearts.

In *musaf* of Rosh Hashanah we say, ובתורתך כתוב לאמר שמע ישראל ד' אלקינו ד'. Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir explained it as follows, ובתורתך כתוב, the purpose of everything written in the Torah, is לאמר, so people can say ד' אחד and believe in Hashem.

The *Zohar* calls the 613 mitzvos "*eitzos*" because the

mitzvos are good counsels towards attaining *emunah*.

The Meor V'Shemesh (*Ki Savo*) writes, "I heard from the Rebbe of Neshchiz *zt'l* that people go to tzaddikim for several reasons. Some go because they want to learn how to daven with awe and love of Hashem. Others go to tzaddikim to learn how to study Torah *l'shmah*. There are those who want to attain *madreigos* in *avodas Hashem*. But all those aren't the primary purpose. The purpose of going to tzaddikim should be to know Hashem and to be aware of His presence. This awareness doesn't have a limit. The more one knows Hashem, the more he realizes that he doesn't know anything at all. Every day, he will seek to increase this awareness more."¹

1. Reb Sadyah Gaon was a guest at someone's house, and his host

Yisro said to Moshe (Shemos 18:19) איעצך ויהי אלקים עמך, "I shall advise you, and may Hashem be with you." Tzaddikim explained, *bederech remez*, that Yisro was giving the following advice: יהי אלקים עמך, always have Hashem on your mind. Hashem should always be in your thoughts.

Reb Nissim Gaon (*Sipurei Masiyos*) told the following story:

A very wealthy man wanted to find a poor person, someone with no hope in life so that he could give him a lot of money. "That will be a good deed I can take to the next world!

After all, I won't be here forever."

He took a package of money in his hand and began his search. His pursuit of a pauper proved harder than he thought it would be. He spoke to many poor people, but they all still hoped for a better future. One poor man received money here and there from his uncle, and another had a low-paying job, but that was also *something*. These weren't the poor people he hoped to find.

One day, he came upon a pitiful sight: An extremely poor person was searching through the garbage for

didn't realize that his guest was one of the greatest scholars of the generation. When he found out, he asked for forgiveness, because he felt he should have honored him more. (The host had honored him, but he would have done more had he known who his guest was.) Reb Sadyah Gaon learned from this episode to constantly do teshuvah, because one should continuously increase his awareness of Hashem's greatness. When one reaches the next level of awareness, he should regret that he didn't serve Hashem properly in the past because he didn't realize whom he was serving. He didn't perceive the greatness of Hashem as he does today. And each day, the awareness increases.

food. The wealthy man approached him and said, "It seems that you don't expect to ever have a good day in your life. You probably think you will always be poor."

"It isn't so," the poor man replied. "I haven't lost hope. The world has a Creator, and He can help me."

The wealthy man realized his search for a hopeless individual was in vain (even this poor man thinks he will one day be saved). So, he buried his bundle of money in the graveyard.

Many years passed, and this wealthy person lost all his money and became poor himself. He went from door to door, asking for handouts.

One day, he remembered that he had buried a large sum of money in the cemetery and went there to unearth it. But digging up graves was against the law, punishable with hanging. Police saw him digging in the graveyard, thought he

was digging up a grave, and arrested him.

The court found him guilty, but before meting out justice, the court granted him permission to speak with the mayor and plead his case. (This courtesy was given to all people convicted in court.)

He said to the mayor, "I wasn't digging up a grave. I was looking for my own money. I buried it there many years ago. You see, I used to be very wealthy. I wanted to give a substantial amount of money to a poor person who had lost all hope. I walked around the streets for a long time but couldn't find such a person. Everyone told me he had hope. There was even a poor man who didn't have food. I found him rummaging in the garbage; it was pitiful. But even he told me that he hadn't lost hope because Hashem could do anything. He told me that Hashem could make him wealthy. I didn't find anyone to give the money to, so I buried it in the cemetery."

The mayor smiled and said, "Don't you recognize me? I was that poor man you found rummaging in the garbage. I trusted that Hashem could help me, and now you see I was correct. Hashem brought me up the ladders of success, and now I'm the city's mayor."

Let's learn from this story never to lose hope because Hashem can do everything.

The Nesivos Shalom of Slonim zy'a told the following incident, which he remembers from his youth, in Baranovitz, Belarus. A German soldier ordered Yidden to line up and face a wall. The Nesivos Shalom's father asked his son to bring him a cup of water. He wanted to say a *shehakol* before leaving the world because it is written in *sefarim* that it is very good

for one to say *shehakol* before his death. With *hislahavus* and with a lot of *kavanah*, he said '*shehakol nehiyeh bidvoro.*' Immediately afterwards, they heard shooting from behind. They turned around and saw that the Belarus army had arrived, and they killed the evil soldiers who had intended to kill them. Their lives were saved.

Men came to the father of the Nesivos Shalom and said, "You saved our lives! With your *shehakol*, you performed a miracle."

The father replied, "It isn't a miracle. I just said *shehakol*, with *emunah* that Hashem does everything. This *emunah* saved us."²

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l told the Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l that when he was in Siberia, one morning

2. The Mishnah in *Brachos* (6:2) says, "על כולם אם אמר שהכל נהיה יצא," "For everything [on all foods], when one says *shehakol*, he is *yotzei*." Tzaddikim explained, "For everything," for any sorrow if one can say *shehakol nehiyeh bidvoro*, that it happened by Hashem's decree, *yatza*, he leaves his troubles.

he woke up, said *Modeh Ani*, and then asked himself, "Why do I praise Hashem for giving me another day of life? What purpose does my life have? I don't have mitzvos to perform; I don't have tefillin, and I don't have a Gemara. Why should I live? But then I told myself that I have *emunah*, and to live in Siberia with *emunah* is a great service for Hashem. My *emunah* certainly gives Hashem a *nachas ruach*. For *emunah* alone, I decided, it is worth living."

The Rayatz replied, "Reb Yechezkel! It is worth it for Hakadosh Baruch Hu all the hardships and sorrows of His beloved children in *galus*

just to hear those beautiful sweet words of *emunah*."³

Hashgachah Pratis

Emunah in Hashem must go together with *emunah* in *hashgachah pratis*.

The *Orchos Chaim* from the *Rosh* (1:26) writes, "Whoever doesn't believe in אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, also doesn't believe in אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ." Anochi Hashem Elokecha teaches us that there is Hashem, and we must believe in Him. Yetzias Mitzrayim teaches us to believe in *hashgachah pratis*.

It was dangerous to get to work late in Communist

3. Tzaddikim of Slonim zt'l taught: It states (Tehillim 148), הִלְלוּ אֶת ה', מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, we call to all creations to praise Hashem. We call to the snow, the *malachim*, and people, young and old, and we request that they praise Hashem. There is only one item of creation in which we add the words *osah devoro*, which means that it does Hashem's will. It states (148:8), רוּחַ סְעָרָה עוֹשֶׂה דְבָרוֹ "Stormy wind fulfilling His word." What does this teach us?

It reminds us that the highest service of Hashem is when things aren't easy. Storm winds are blowing, and life is filled with hardships, yet one continues to believe in Hashem and that everything is for the good. That *emunah* is praise to Hashem.

Russia. One could be arrested for such a crime. Once, a person was walking to his job, where he polished diamonds when someone stopped him and pleaded that he come to the beis knesses. "It is my parent's yahrtzeit today, and we need you for minyan."

The man, wanting to help a fellow Yid, agreed to stay for a few moments. He explained that he couldn't stay long because he couldn't be late for work.

He came into the beis knesses and discovered that he wasn't the tenth man. Several others needed to be recruited. By the time a minyan gathered, the diamond polisher realized that if he stayed for the tefillah, he might be late for work. But he wanted to help, so he chose to take the risk. He didn't have the heart to leave and break the minyan.

When they finished davening, everyone was invited to enjoy some cake

and vodka *l'iluy nishmas*, but at this point, the diamond polisher hastily excused himself and dashed out the door and raced to the diamond center. As he neared the entrance, he was met by an acquaintance. "Run away! Everyone inside was arrested!"

He escaped and managed to come to Eretz Yisrael with his diamonds.

This is a story of *hashgachah pratis*. He was away from work just at the right time, so his life was spared.

Once, Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* was wondering whether to go to a particular place and was weighing the cons and pros of going. In the end, he went and broke his foot on the way. He commented, "Now I know that I had to come here. It was destined that I break my foot, so I had to be here so that it could occur."

Instead of telling himself, "I shouldn't have gone. Look

at what happened to me," he recognized that everything happens with *hashgachah pratis*, and even a broken foot is destined from heaven.

Emunah Peshutah

The highest level of emunah is *emunah peshutah*, to believe in Hashem with simplicity.

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l said that after all his lofty *madreigos*, he believes in Hashem as a young child believes in Hashem. When you tell children ideas of emunah (such as that Hashem sees us, guides us with *hashgachah pratis*, gave us the Torah, rewards those who keep the Torah, etc.), children swallow up these truths without questioning them. They don't debate, philosophize, or doubt. It is as true to them as everything else they know.

The Yeitev Lev zt'l says that this is the reason Yosef is called in Tanach ילד and נער, as it states (*Bereishis* 37:2), והוא נער את בני זלפה, and it states (*Bereishis* 37:30), והילד איננו. The

words ילד and נער represent a youth, and this describes Yosef HaTzaddik's perfection in emunah. He believed in Hashem with the certainty of a child's belief in Hashem.

יאמין is *roshei teivos* for ילד, לכל דבר, someone who believes everything. Whatever you tell a child, he gobbles up as fact and truth. It is, therefore, important to speak to children about emunah.

We say in the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah (*Yirmiyahu* 31:19), הבן יקיר לי אפרים אם ילד, שעשועים, "Efraim my favorite son, or a delightful child..." This pasuk tells of Hashem's special love for Bnei Yisrael. The word ילד is used, which represents יאמין לכל דבר (someone who believes everything) because this is the trait that makes us beloved to Hashem.

The mazal of *chodesh* Shevat is דלי (bucket) which is *roshei teivos* for יאמין לכל דבר. This is an ideal month to acquire this perfection and purity in *emunah peshutah*.

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l said that *emunah peshutah* is the highest form of *emunah* because when the *emunah* is based on the intellect, the mind is limited, so automatically, his *emunah* will be limited. But when one believes in Hashem with simplicity, this belief isn't dependent on any rationale; it isn't contingent on the mind's capacity and, therefore, is the highest form of *emunah*.

Years ago, in Communist Russia, a Jewish couple was blessed with a child. The mother wanted her child to have a bris milah, but her husband refused because every Jewish ceremony in those days came with a risk of imprisonment.

She knew of a day that her husband would be traveling, so she wrote a letter to the Ribnitzer Rebbe zt'l (known for his *mesirus nefesh* to perform bris milah) and requested that he come and circumcise her son.

The Rebbe arrived together with his friend, Reb Mendel Futerfass zt'l. It was risky to perform the mitzvah, but they did it with joy and *mesirus nefesh*.

But after the milah, the child began to bleed profusely and needed medical care. They couldn't call a doctor because the doctor would report them to the KGB.

The Ribnitzer Rebbe went into a side room for a short time, and when he came out, Reb Mendel Futerfass exclaimed, "You performed a miracle! The child stopped bleeding! What did you do there?"

The Rebbe replied, "I prayed. I said, 'Ribono shel Olam! We came here to do a great mitzvah. Protect us,' and Hashem heard my tefillos."

When Reb Mendel Futerfass would repeat this story, he would express his admiration of the Ribnitzer Rebbe's *emunah peshutah*. "I

was so afraid, I couldn't think straight, but the Ribnitzer Rebbe knew that the solution was tefillah. With his *emunah peshutah*, he saved the child and our lives."

It states (18:9), ויחד יתרו על כל, הטובה אשר עשה ה' לישראל "Yisro rejoiced over all the good Hashem did for Yisrael." Rashi writes two translations for the word ויחד:

וישמח יתרו זהו פשוטו ומדרשו נעשה בשרו חדודין חדודין, מיצר על אבוד מצרים. "Yisro was happy. That is the simple translation. The *drash* is that his flesh became prickly because the deaths of the Mitzrim pained him."

I heard from a *talmid chacham* that Rashi hints that *emunah peshutah* results in happiness. Rashi writes, וישמח יתרו זהו פשוטו, when one follows פשוטו, the simple approach of *emunah*, this results in happiness. ומדרשו, but when one *darshens*, and asks questions on Hashem's *hasghachah*, his flesh becomes prickly, and he hurts all

over. He is left with questions on Hashem that disturb him.

Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa related the following parable:

Three people were in a prison cell that had no windows. It was pitch dark inside, by day and night. The guards would bring them food daily, but eating in the dark is hard. To make matters harder, the jailors brought them different eating utensils every day, complicating matters even more. Two of the prisoners always figured out how to eat the meals, but there was one prisoner who wasn't very clever, and wasn't managing, so one of his cellmates took it upon himself to teach him. Every day, before a meal, he would describe the food placed before them and instruct him how to eat it.

The third prisoner never helped with teaching the unwise one how to eat. Instead, he spent his time

drilling a little hole in the wall of the dark prison.

One day, the prisoner (who helped the unclever prisoner) said to the one who drilled, "Why can't you help me out once in a while with teaching our cellmate how to eat? Why do you put this job solely on me?"

"I am helping our foolish friend immensely," he replied. "I'm drilling a hole in the wall. When I succeed, there will be light in our cell, and this fellow will understand how to eat on his own."

The *nimshal* is *emunah*. When there is *emunah*, life is bright, and there is happiness. The greatest favor you can do for yourself and others is to shine in the bright light of *emunah*.

The Chovos HaLevavos tells a *maschal* of blind people who were in a home, and they kept bumping into the furniture. They complained, "Why did the *baal habayis* put us here? This place is a

mess. He purposely placed obstacles in our path to harm us."

Sometime later, a great doctor healed them, and they could see. Now, they recognized that everything in the room, which they had thought was harmful and unfriendly, was there for their benefit.

This is what occurs when we acquire the bright light of *emunah*. We then recognize that everything happens *b'hashgachah pratis*, for our benefit.

Act Right Away

It states (Koheles 9:10) כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה, "Whatever you can do with your might, do it."

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l says that בכחך means thoughts, *chachmah* (because *חכמה* spells כ"ח מ"ה). So, the *pasuk* is telling us כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך, if you have a good thought, an idea that can bring forth a *kiddush Hashem* or kindness to

others, עשה, do it right away. Don't procrastinate.

Good thought comes from Above, and if you don't act upon them right away, your inspiration will wane and then vanish, and you will probably never get around to doing the good deed. So, if you have a good idea, act immediately. Capture the moment and the opportunity.

At the beginning of the parashah, Rashi writes, "What did Yisro hear that caused him to come? He heard about kriyas Yam Suf and milchemes Amalek."

What specifically about kriyas Yam Suf and milchemes Amalek inspired Yisro to come to the desert to receive the Torah?

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l explains that, generally, before a person travels, he has to close his businesses, sell his property, say goodbye to friends, and make other arrangements. One doesn't just pick up and

go. So why did Yisro come so suddenly? We understand that he was inspired by kriyas Yam Suf to join the Jewish nation, but why the rush? We know that he rushed because he arrived before Shavuot!

The answer is: Yisro heard about milchemes Amalek. Yisro understood that Amalek could've only come by acting quickly, without thinking. Had Amalek taken some time to think things over, he would have realized that it was suicidal to battle the Jewish nation, to whom Hashem performed miracles, ten makos, and kriyas Yam Suf. Yisro realized that he must do the same. If he would dally and think things over, he would never come. He was inspired, so he had to act immediately.

The Yesod HaAvodah says that it is alluded to in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 111), שכל טוב, if you have a good thought, לכל עשיהם, bring it to action.

When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish nation, they replied, נעשה ונשמע. They didn't ask, "What is written in the Torah?" Instead, they jumped in and accepted the Torah. This is often the only way to excel in avodas Hashem.

Let's say you thought of a shidduch for someone. Don't push off suggesting it. Instead, see what you can do. And if you are inspired to think about Hashem's kindness or hashgachah pratis, don't wait for the future to focus on this thought. The same applies to all good, virtuous ideas. Instead of pushing it off for tomorrow and maybe forever, act now.

Bikur Cholim

The rishonim discuss whether bikur cholim is a mitzvah from the Torah or a mitzvah d'rabbanan. Many sources imply that bikur

cholim is a Torah obligation. If the basis for bikur cholim is chesed, that is also a mitzvah from the Torah, as it falls under the umbrella mitzvah of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, "Love your fellow man like yourself." Furthermore, it states (*Devarim* 28:9), והלכת בדרכיו, "You shall go in His ways," and it states (*Devarim* 13:5), אחרי, "After Hashem your G-d shall you follow," and Chazal explain this to mean that we should follow Hashem's ways by visiting the ill and performing other forms of chesed.

According to some *rishonim*, the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is expressed in *parashas Korach* (*Bamidbar* 16:29). Moshe said, ופקודת כל אדם יפקד עליהם, "If the destiny of all men has visited upon them," and the Gemara (*Nedarim* 39:) explains, "If they die like all ill people, who lie on their beds and people come to visit them..."⁴ (רי"א"ז הלכות נדרים).

4. Moshe said to the nation that if Korach and his followers die a regular, usual death, that is a sign that Korach was correct with

Another popular source is in this week's parashah (18:20), והודעת להם את הדרך ילכו בה, "You shall make known to them the path on which they should go..." The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 30:) says that this refers to visiting the ill.⁵

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 40:) relates that a student of Reb Akiva's yeshiva was ill, and the students of the yeshiva weren't coming to visit him, so Reb Akiva, himself, came to visit his student. Reb Akiva tidied up the room, washed the floors, and the

sick student said, "Rebbe, you granted me life."

"Reb Akiva went and taught his students, 'Whoever doesn't visit the sick, it is like murder, and whoever visits the sick brings him life.'"

The Seder HaYom writes, "*Bikur cholim* is the from highest forms of *gemilus chasadim*, as Chazal (*Nedarim* 39:) write, '*Bikur cholim* has not no limit (אין להם שיעור).'

Sometimes, with clever, encouraging, and kind

his *machlokes* against Moshe. An example of an ordinary death is when a person becomes ill and people come to visit him. This source shows that it is proper to visit the sick.

5. Every year, Baron Rothschild z'l would visit the Ksav Sofer zt'l, at a vacation/health resort they both frequented. One year, the Ksav Sofer wasn't feeling well, and the Baron cut his visit short. The Ksav Sofer asked him why he wasn't staying longer.

The Baron replied, "Chazal call visiting the sick (18:20) ילכו, 'to go.' This is because when you visit the sick, you have to know when to leave. This is because your visit might burden the ill person, and sometimes the ill person is embarrassed to be seen in this state. Therefore, the Torah says ילכו, that you have to know when to leave."

The Ksav Sofer often repeated this *vort* that he heard from Baron Rothschild.

words, one can revive a sick person and grant him life. We have seen this happen many times. Sometimes a person visits the sick for an hour or two, and the ill person says, 'I feel like a new person. My *neshamah* came back to me,' and we see that the illness became lighter."

Happiness is a cure for all illnesses, and this is one of the services we do for the ill when we visit them. We make them happy, which makes their condition easier to bear, and sometimes it can cure them. It states (*Mishlei* 18:14), רוח איש יכלכל מוחללו, ורוח נכאה מי ישאנה, "A man's spirit will sustain his sickness, but who can support a broken spirit." The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that *ruach* means happiness. "When a person is happy, he can handle his illness... His joy will annul it. But when one is sad, who can carry it?"

The Rambam writes, "Tell an ill person happy stories that will gladden his

heart. Tell him interesting news that will take his mind off his illness, make him laugh, and make the people caring for him laugh. When you choose someone to be with a sick person, choose someone who can make him happy because this is what is needed."

Sodi Razyah (attributed to the Rokeach) writes, "When one visits the sick, he should speak to his heart comforting and encouraging words." These encouraging words will bring joy and at times, *refuah*, too.

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 40.) writes the many rewards of visiting and caring for the ill. Among them is that he will be saved from Gehinom, and is granted long life, protection from the yetzer hara, he is saved from afflictions, everyone honors him, and he will have good friends who give him good counsel, and he will be saved from bad friends who give bad counsel.

The *meforshim* explain that these rewards are מדה כנגד מדה. For example, the Gemara says that visiting the sick saves one from afflictions. This reward is מדה כנגד מדה measure per measure. He saved the ill person from afflictions therefore, he is rewarded that he won't be afflicted.

We add that he will be saved from the ill person'. Just as he helped the ill person overcome that illness, Hashem will help him that he won't be afflicted with that illness.

Everyone Must Learn Torah

Rashi (19:6). writes לא פחות ולא יותר, "Nothing less and nothing more." Literally, this means that Moshe shouldn't add or subtract words. He should repeat Hashem's message, which praises Bnei Yisrael if they accept the Torah. The Sar Shalom of Belz zy"א says that Rashi's words, לא פחות ולא יותר hints that no one is less than someone who doesn't study Torah, and no one is

greater than a person who does study Torah."

The Beis Aharon zt'l would say that he can't look in the face of someone who didn't study a *daf* Gemara that day.

Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiler never spoke negatively on Yidden, but he once spoke very degradingly against those who don't study Torah.

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy"א would say, "Someone who doesn't study Gemara is *"Nisht kein Yid und nisht kein mensch,"* not a Yid, and not even a human being.

It states (*Bereishis* 10:10), ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל, "His first kingdom was Bavel." Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l would say that this pasuk implies, "One should begin with Talmud Bavli." That is the basis of being a Yid.

Torah for Everyone

In Shemonah Esrei we say, השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבתו מלכנו

לעבודתך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך. In this brachah, we mention studying Torah before doing teshuvah. Reb Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l explains that this teaches us to study Torah always, even when we feel unworthy and even when we have *aveiros*. Even when we are still before teshuvah, we should study Torah.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos, Shaavuous* 5562) zt'l writes, "The Torah wasn't given to individuals, it was given to all of klal Yisrael, the sinners ['the *chelbenah*'] and the tzaddikim ['the *besamim*']. We received the Torah [on Har Sinai] after we had fallen to the forty-ninth gate of *tumah* [and this proves that Torah is for everyone, from the tzaddikim down to the lowliest Yidden]."

The *meforshim* ask why the *Aseres HaDibros* begin with אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך ממצרים, "I am Hashem

your G-d who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim," instead of "I am Hashem... Who created heaven and earth." We can answer that we mention yetzias Mitzrayim to remember that just a short time before, we were at the 49th level of *tumah*. And with that awareness, no one will say that he isn't worthy of studying or practicing the Torah.

Yisro worshiped every *avodah zarah* that existed in his time and was also a high-ranking priest. Yet he came to the desert and received the Torah. This proves that regardless of one's past, one can receive the Torah. Rebbe Leibeile Eiger zy"l explains that this is why matan Torah is written in parashas *Yisro*. It reminds us that Torah is for everyone. No one should think Torah isn't for him.⁶

6. It states, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם עלי, "I lifted you on eagle's wings, and I brought you to Me" (19:4). A *neshar* is either an eagle

In a *drashah*, Reb Chaim Kreisworth zt'l said: Two people came to me for a *din Torah*. One was a wealthy diamond dealer, and the other was his sales agent. The agent claimed they agreed to a .06% commission, while the dealer argued that the agreement was .05%.

Reb Chaim Kreisworth noticed that some people listening to his *drashah* were laughing. They considered it absurd that a *din Torah* should be over .01%. Wealthy people shouldn't be bickering over such a small amount. Reb Chaim

Kreisworth told them to stop laughing because the sales were for a billion dollars. .01%, therefore, was a million dollars, a substantial amount, according to everyone's standards.

Reb Chaim concluded, "There are people who think that their Torah learning doesn't have value, they think that they don't learn *l'shmah*, etc. But the reward of Torah is so great, even if one only receives .01% of the reward of Torah, it is also extremely valuable."⁷

or a vulture. Either way, it is a non-kosher bird. The Imrei Emes zy"א explained that the pasuk is saying that even when a person is on a low spiritual level like a *neshet*, if he studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring him close [to Him].

7. Hashem accepts the Torah of all Yidden, yet the more *l'shmah* and the more kedushah and taharah, the higher and the greater the Torah study.

The Chazon Ish said there are geniuses in our generation as there were in the past, yet we don't reach their levels. No one in our times is becoming a Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l, for example. This is because a great mind isn't sufficient. One needs kedushah and taharah, and in this aspect, we don't compare to the scholars of the past (*Maaseh Ish* vol.2:10).

Hashem promises the Jewish nation that if they receive the Torah (19:5), והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים "You shall be for the most beloved treasure of all peoples."⁸

A *segulah* reminds us of the *nekudah* "*segal*," which is the formation of three dots (two on top and one beneath). The uniqueness of a *segal* is that even when it lies on its side, it remains a *segal*. Any way you turn it, it remains a *segal*. None of the other

nekudos has this trait. Therefore, Hashem says, והייתם לי סגולה, you will be like a *segal*. This means, even if you fall, you will always remain the *am segulah*, a precious nation to Hashem.

Hashem Wants that We Toil in Torah

At the beginning of the parashah, Rashi writes מה שמועה שמעו ובאו, קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק, "What did Yisro hear that caused him to come?

8. The Or HaChaim HaKadosh explains that a *segulah* is something that can't be explained with logic. This is unlike a *refuah*, a cure that can be explained logically and scientifically.

The Or HaChaim gives some examples. One is that when a goy studies Torah or keeps Shabbos, he is *chayav misah* (deserves to die), yet when a Yid studies Torah or keeps Shabbos, it's the greatest deed. This is something that can't be understood logically because if the deed is good, it should be good when a goy does it, too! It is a *segulah*, and we can't explain it with logic.

Another example is the desire to do a mitzvah or an aveirah. When Yidden desire to do a mitzvah, they are rewarded like they performed the mitzvah, and when they want to do an aveirah, they are not punished for their evil intentions. But for the goyim, the opposite is true. They are punished for their evil desires as if they committed the aveirah and aren't rewarded for their good wishes. Logically, we don't understand this rule, but it is a *segulah*, a rule that we accept without understanding.

He heard about kriyas Yam Suf and the war against Amalek." The *meforshim* explain, in various ways, why these two factors specifically caused Yisro to join the nation.

Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorka *zt'l* explains that when Yisro heard of the miracles of *kriyas Yam Suf*, he wanted to join the nation, but he had one fear that held him back. He felt he wouldn't succeed in serving Hashem one hundred percent properly. He feared that he would fail at times. But then he heard about *milchemes* Amalek and discovered that Hashem wants the struggles and battles. Hashem doesn't want that everything should be perfect. "If so," Yisro told himself, "I can also receive the Torah."

The Gemara (*Megillah* 3) tells us that when Yonoson Ben Uziel translated *Navi* (תרגום יונתן), Eretz Yisrael shook four hundred *parsah* by four hundred *parsah* and a *bas kol* announced, "Who is revealing my secrets?"

Yonoson ben Uziel stood up and said, "I am revealing the secrets," and he explained that he did so for Hashem's honor, so there won't be many *machlokes* in Yisrael..."

Why did Eretz Yisrael shake and tremble when Yonoson ben Uziel wrote this commentary?

The Tosfos Ri"d explains that the problem was that the translation made Torah study easy, and it shouldn't be that way. Ideally, Torah should require toil before one understands it.

A creative scholar built himself a rotating table, so he won't need to stand up to seek a sefer. Instead, when he needed a sefer, he remained seated and just turned the table until the sefer he needed was positioned in front of him.

When the Trumas HaDeshen saw this table, he commented that it wasn't a good invention. The Torah student should stand up and invest effort to get the

sefer. In the merit of his toil, he will understand Torah.

So if a person finds Torah difficult to understand, this doesn't mean it isn't for him. On the contrary, Torah requires toil, and if he sets himself to the task, he will understand it.

Rebbe Aharon Roth zt'l writes (*Shomer Emunim*) that there was a time that he couldn't daven, and couldn't learn because he tasted bitterness in every word. One day, he davened at the *kever* of a tzaddik buried in Yerushalayim, and then immediately opened a *sefer*. It opened to the Rosh in *hilchos Mikvaos*. He decided that he won't stop learning it until he understood it. He said that initially, it was a very bitter experience. He could hardly study; it was so bitter and painful for him. But he kept at it, and at the end of this learning session, the Torah became sweet for him.

In last week's parashah (ch.15), the Jewish nation came to Marah, and the waters were bitter. Hashem showed Moshe a tree, which he threw into the water, and the waters became sweet.

It states (*Shemos* 15:23), ולא יכלו לשתת מים ממרה כי מרים הם, "They couldn't drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter." We can explain b'derech remez that the Jewish nation couldn't drink the waters of Torah because they felt a bitter taste in the Torah. ויראהו ה' עץ, Hashem gave Moshe an עצה, a counsel. וישלך אל המים, The nation should throw themselves into the waters of Torah. They should force themselves to study, even if the waters are bitter. The Jewish nation did so, וימתקו, and the Torah became sweet for them. This is as Rashi writes in this week's parashah (19:5), "If you accept the Torah [on yourselves], it will be sweet for you from now on because all beginnings are difficult."

Torah for *Baalabatim*

Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l once asked someone why he doesn't learn Torah.

"I don't have time," the man replied. "I'm busy the entire day earning a living."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner told him, "Your response is similar to what the nations of the world said when Hashem offered them the Torah. Each nation said they couldn't receive the Torah because their essence is to steal, kill, etc.; if they accepted the Torah, they would lose their life source. You're saying the same thing. You claim you can't attach yourself to Torah study because it will take away your livelihood."

The claim that there is no time for Torah study is often untrue. People generally have time. If they are conscientious with their time, they will discover that they have ample time for Torah study.

Furthermore, one shouldn't say, "I need to make a living, so I don't have time to study Torah," because the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 19) states, "Whoever studies Torah, his property prospers." One earns money from studying Torah.

A chassid wrote in a *kvittel* to Rebbe Yochanan of Rachmastrivka zy" a that he wants "brachah and hatzlachah with everything I do."

Rebbe Yochanan told him, "Dovid HaMelech's counsel for hatzlachah is to study Torah. As he writes, in the first chapter of Tehillim, כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חִפְצוּ... וְכֹל, 'His desire is the Torah of Hashem... and everything he does will succeed.' This isn't solely a brachah; it is a guarantee. If you study Torah, you will succeed with everything you do."

Therefore, working people should find time for Torah study. It will increase their parnassah, and most

importantly, it is their moment of connection with Hashem, which is so important. And with a good plan, they can often make significant strides in Torah knowledge.

A religious taxi driver once drove the Steipler Gaon zt'l in his car and asked for counsel. "I go to a Torah shiur at night when I finish driving, but I'm so tired, I always fall asleep at the shiur. Is it worth continuing going to this shiur?"

The Steipler encouraged him to continue. He said, "You will be rewarded and honored in the next world as if you were a general because you are doing the best you can."

The Gemara (Succah 28.) calls the Gemara דבר קטן, a small matter, and it calls kabbalah דבר גדול, a great matter. Reb Boruch Ber (the Birkas Shmuel) zt'l, said to his students that this Gemara is difficult. How can we refer to the discussions of the

Gemara דבר קטן, a small matter?

He compared it to a man drowning in the sea when someone heard his shouts, swam out to him, and saved his life. At the same time, a hungry person was walking on a street. He whispered to someone that he was starving, and the person ran and brought him food immediately.

Now, who did a greater deed, the one who saved the person's life or the person who brought the food? In a way, the person who brought the food did a greater deed because the test was far greater. When a man sees someone drowning at sea, he will undoubtedly save his life if he can. If he lets him drown, he is a rasha and will live with a guilty conscience for the rest of his life. But people don't feel as obligated to help a hungry man. So, giving food will be considered a דבר גדול, a great deed, and saving someone's life will be called דבר קטן, a small act. It is not small in

importance, but small because it was not a choice. This describes learning Gemara. We should feel that there is simply no other option. What else should one do other than delve into

the lessons found in the Gemara?⁹

Torah All Day Long

Even if you only learn an hour a day, it can be

9. The Gemara (Brachos 5) says, "If a person sees that *yesurim*, sufferings are approaching him, he should check his deeds. If he doesn't find anything, he should attribute the *yesurim* to *bitul Torah*." The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* explains that, at first, he should think about the sins he committed to warrant this punishment. If he doesn't find a sin that would bring on this punishment, he can attribute his *yesurim* to *bitul Torah* because תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם, Torah study is equivalent to all the mitzvos. Therefore, all types of punishment could come because due to *bitul Torah*.

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* related the following story: A couple was looking for a *shidduch* for their daughter. The father found just the *bachur* he was hoping for. This *bachur* was an exceptional *talmid chacham*. His wife, however, didn't agree to the *shidduch* since the *bachur* had a slight limp, which was noticeable when he walked. So the *shidduch* was turned down.

Every morning, before *Shacharis*, this wife would bring her husband a cup of coffee. Shortly after they turned down the *shidduch*, she brought him his morning coffee when she tripped and broke her foot. In agony, she yelled, "I told you not to drink coffee before *Shacharis*!" She attributed her broken foot to her husband's drinking coffee before *Shacharis*. She didn't want to recognize that she could be being punished for turning down a good *shidduch* for her daughter.

Reb Shmuelevitz told this story to teach us that when one seeks the *aveirah*, the cause for his suffering, he should do so with sincerity and truth because sometimes he might discover something he doesn't want to acknowledge.

considered as if you learned the entire day. This is based on the principle that Chazal (*Kiddushin* 40) say, "If one wants to do a mitzvah, but there is an אנוס, and he isn't able to perform the mitzvah, the Torah gives him credit as if he performed the mitzvah." So, if he doesn't have time for Torah, but he wants to study Torah, he will be rewarded as if he studied Torah all day long.

However, the Choshen Yehoshua clarifies that this is only if he devotes his free time to Torah. His set times for Torah prove that he would study more if he had more time. However, if he doesn't study Torah when he has time, he cannot claim that he would study all day long if he had the time to do so. And then, he won't be rewarded as if he studied all day long.

So, when you study for one hour a day, your reward won't be for only that hour. You have many hours because all the hours you work and wish you could learn Torah are considered as if you learned Torah at that time.

This is implied in *Pirkei Avos* (4:10), אם בטלת מן התורה יש לך בטלים הרבה כנגדך. The Chofetz Chaim explains, אם בטלת מן התורה, if you don't study Torah when you have free time, יש לך בטלים הרבה כנגדך, you will have many hours of *batalah*, because it will be assumed that also the hours when you were at work, you wouldn't have studied Torah, even if you would have had the opportunity to do so. But when you study that hour, you will receive reward as if you studied all day.¹⁰

10. There was a talmid chacham in Yerushalayim who suffered from Alzheimer's. Before his grandchild's chasunah, the family gave him a strong pill that helped him think clearly for several hours. They did this so he could participate in the chasunah, but

It states (*Tehillim* 87), ה' יספור, בכתוב עמים. The Yismach Yisrael zt'l explains, "Hashem counts with the numbers of non-Jews." The numbers of non-Jews have a zero. When

there are many zeros, it can become a significant number when the number one is placed before it. The same applies to Torah study. Sometimes, a person doesn't have much time to study

he was found in the beis medresh, studying Torah. He said, "Now that I finally have a clear mind, I want to use it for Torah study."

The lesson for us is that people are busy and don't have much time for Torah, but it sometimes happens that there is time for Torah. Be wise and grasp those moments for Torah study.

The Chofetz Chaim writes, "A wise person should keep in mind that every time he joins a group of idle-talkers, and every time he wastes time reading the newspaper about issues that aren't related to Him, Hakadosh Baruch Hu cries over this loss of time. He could have used this time to study Torah to acquire diamonds and pearls, illuminating his lot eternally and granting him honor and greatness. And he exchanges them for matters that have no benefit. When a person thinks about this, he will study Torah whenever he has a free moment, for this is his good fortune and eternal life."

When was the Torah given? We don't know for sure. The Gemara says it was either on the sixth or the seventh day of Sivan.

Where was the Torah given? We know that the Torah was given on Har Sinai, but where is Har Sinai? No one knows for sure. Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l concluded, "So we don't know *when* the Torah was given, and we don't know *where* the Torah was given. This is to teach us that every moment and every place is ideal for Torah."

Sometimes people say, "I can't learn here. The atmosphere isn't productive for my learning." Or they say, "I can't learn now." We weren't told the exact date or place of *matan Torah*, so we should know that every place and time is ideal for Torah study.

Torah. Most of the day, he is busy earning a living. Those working hours are like many zeros. Then, when he learns for one hour, he puts that hour before all the zeros, and it is considered as if he studied Torah for many hours.¹¹

Tzaddikim of Slonim zt'l said, "When an hour passes by without learning Torah, the hour is worth zero. When another hour passes by without Torah, there is another zero, and so on. But when a person learns one hour of Torah, it is a 'one.' If this one hour is placed before all the zeros, the number becomes very large.

"But this hour of Torah must be *before* all the zeros. If it is at the end, it will not be a large number."

How does one ensure that his 'one hour' of Torah is placed before the zeros?

One answer is to learn right in the morning, at the beginning of the day. This will place the 'one' before all the zeros.

The Rebbes of Slonim, however, offered another solution. When a person considers his hour of Torah the most precious and important part of his day, he has placed that hour in the beginning and will end up with a huge number. But if he considers other aspects of his day to be more important, he places the 'one' at the end.

Chazal tell us that the Torah was given on Shabbos. This hints how we should revere the times we designate for Torah study. No one

11. This also applies to Shovavim. Many days of Shovavim have passed, and if we didn't take advantage of these days, they are many zeros. But if we do teshuvah even on the final day, we've placed a number one before all the zeros, turning it into a vast number.

would desecrate the Shabbos, *chalilah*, even if he could earn a lot of money. We should have this same dedication to Torah. No gains should draw us away from studying Torah.¹²

The Ramchal zy" a says that when one studies Torah, he should consider it as if he is standing Shemonah Esrei and nothing could interrupt him.

12. Reb Motel Slonimer zt'l was poor; he had a tiny apartment in Yerushalayim. Yet, he said that for all the money in the world, he wouldn't agree to give away even the smallest amount of Shabbos. He wasn't referring to transgressing the Shabbos to earn money. Many Yidden would be prepared to forfeit money rather than be *mechalel* Shabbos, *chalilah*. He was referring to the pleasure he had on Shabbos. He said he wouldn't give away the tiniest bit of Shabbos for all the money in the world. Let's say he had two types of fish on Shabbos, or a song he enjoyed singing on Shabbos, or any other pleasure on Shabbos. He wouldn't agree to give it up for all the money in the world. This is an amazing statement, and it inspires us to make the most of Shabbos.

An old, poor person, a *baal yesurim*, complained that he no longer desired to live. Rebbe Mordechai Zvhiller zt'l asked him, "If someone gave you the wealth of Baron Rothschild on condition that you violate one Shabbos, would you agree to do that?"

"Of course not," the man replied.

"So you are wealthier than Rothschild! With this thought in mind, you will realize that there are many reasons to be happy with your life."